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PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

PAOLO & FRANCESCA

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

O Lasso!
Quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
Menò costoro al doloroso passo

DANTE

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TO

GEORGE ALEXANDER

THIS PLAY IS DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR

CHARACTERS

GIOVANNI MALATESTA ("LO SCIANCATO")	*Tyrant of Rimini*
PAOLO ("IL BELLO")	*Brother to Giovanni, and Captain of Mercenaries in the service of Florence*
VALENTINO	*Officers of Paolo's Company*
CORRADO	
LUIGI	
MARCO	*A Soldier*
PULCI	*A Drug-seller*
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI	*Bride of Giovanni, and Daughter of Guido da Polenta, Tyrant of Ravenna*
LUCREZIA DEGL' ONESTI	*Cousin to Giovanni*
COSTANZA	*Kinswoman to Francesca*
TESSA	*Daughter to Pulci*
NITA	*Maid to Francesca*
ANGELA	*A Blind and Aged Servant of the Malatesta*
MIRRA	*A Peasant Girl*

Guests, Couriers, Soldiers, Customers of Pulci Servants, &c.

ACT I

PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

SCENE.—*A gloomy Hall in the Malatesta Castle at Rimini, hung with weapons and instruments of the Chase;* GUESTS *and* CITIZENS *assembled, with* SOLDIERS, HUNTSMEN *and* RETAINERS; *hounds held in leash. As the scene opens a trumpet is blown outside. Enter* GIOVANNI *hurriedly down a gallery to the Hall with papers in his hands He pauses on the steps.*

GIO. Peace to this house of Rimini henceforth!
Kinsmen, although the Ghibelline is fallen
And lies out on the plains of Trentola,
Still have we foes untrampled, wavering friends.
Therefore, on victory to set a seal,

To-day I take to wife Ravenna's child,
Daughter of great Polenta, our ally;
Between us an indissoluble bond.
Deep in affairs my brother I despatched,
My Paolo—who is indeed myself—
For scarcely have we breathed a separate thought—
To bring her on the road to Rimini.

[*A noise of falling chains is heard.*

I hear them at the gates; the chains have fallen.

The doors at end of gallery are thrown open. Enter out of sunlight PAOLO, *leading* FRANCESCA *by the hand, followed by* LADIES *and* SQUIRES. *Flowers are thrown over them.* FRANCESCA *bends low to* GIOVANNI, *who raises her up.*

Rise up, Francesca, and unveil your face.

[*He kisses her on the forehead.*

Kinsmen, and you that follow with my bride,
You see me beat with many blows, death-pal

With gushing of much blood, and deaf with war—
You see me, and I languish for a calm.
I ask no great thing of the skies; I ask
Henceforth a quiet breathing, that this child,
Hither all dewy from her convent fetched,
Shall lead me gently down the slant of life.
Here then I sheathe my sword; and fierce must be
That quarrel where again I use the steel.

[*A murmur of approbation. He turns to* FRANCESCA.

Tell me, Francesca; can you be content
To live the quiet life which I propose?
Where, though you miss the violent joys of youth,
Yet will I cherish you more carefully
Than might a younger lover of your years.

FRANC. My lord, my father gave me to you: I
Am innocent as yet of this great life;
My only care to attend the holy bell,
To sing and to embroider curiously:
And as through glass I view the windy world.

Sweet is the stillness you ensure to me
Whose days have been so still: and yet I fear
To be found wanting in so great a house:
I lack experience in such governing.
So if at any time I seem to offend you,
Will you impute it to my youth! But I
Shall never fail in duty willingly.

GIO. I like that coldness in you, my Francesca,
And to my cousin I will make you known.
Widowed and childless, she has ruled till now
This fort of soldiers, a rough hostelry,
Which henceforth is your home; since I remember
She was my friend: has often cooled a rashness,
Which I inherit: lean at first on her.

LUC. Francesca, as your husband says, we two
Have long been friends; but friendship faints in love,
And since through inexperience you may err,
My place is near you; to advise and guide
Suits with my years.

COSTANZA. O Lord of Rimini!
With sighs we leave her as we leave a child.
Be tender with her, even as God hath been!
She hath but wondered up at the white clouds;
Hath just spread out her hands to the warm sun;
Hath heard but gentle words and cloister sounds.

[GIOVANNI *bows to her.*

GIO. Friends, you will go with us to church; till then
Walk where you please—yet one word more—be sure
That, though I sheathe the sword, I am not tamed.
What I have snared, in that I set my teeth
And lose with agony; when hath the prey
Writhed from our mastiff-fangs?

LUC. Giovanni, loose
Francesca's hands—the tears are in her eyes.

GIO. Well, well, till church-time then. Paolo, stay!

[*Exeunt* LUCREZIA, GUESTS *and* RETAINERS; NITA *and attendant* LADIES *remaining in the background.* GIOVANNI, PAOLO, *and* FRANCESCA *come down.*

These delegates from Pesaro, Francesca,
Expect my swift decision on the tax.
Then will you think me negligent or cold
If to my brother I confide you still,
A moment—and no more? [*Exit* GIOVANNI.

FRANC. O, Paolo,
Who were they that have lived within these walls?

PAO. Why do you ask?

FRANC. It is not sign nor sound;
Only it seemeth difficult to breathe,
It is as though I battled with this air.

PAO. You are not sad?

FRANC. What is it to be sad?
Nothing hath grieved me yet but ancient woes,
Sea-perils, or some long-ago farewell,

Or the last sunset cry of wounded kings.
I have wept but on the pages of a book,
And I have longed for sorrow of my own.

PAO. Come nothing nearer than such far-off tears
Or peril from the pages of a book;
And, therefore, sister, am I glad that you
Are wedded unto one so full of shelter.
Constant is he, and steel-true till the grave.
For me—to-night I must be gone.

FRANC. To-night!
Ah, Paolo, go not away so soon!
You brought me hither—leave me not at once,
Not now——

PAO. Francesca!

FRANC. I am still a child.
I feel that to my husband I could go
Kiss him good-night, or sing him to his sleep,
And there an end.

PAO. Sister, I would that I——

FRANC. Can we not play together a brief while?

Stay, then, a little! Soon I shall be used
To my grave place and duty—but not yet.
Stay, then, a little!

PAO. Here my brother comes.

Enter GIOVANNI.

GIO. Stand either side of me—you whom I love.

I'd have you two as dear now to each other
As both of you to me. We are, Francesca,
A something more than brothers—fiercest friends;
Concordia was our mother named, and ours
Is but one heart, one honour, and one death.
Any that came between us I would kill.

FRANC. Sir, I will love him: is he not my brother?

[NITA *advances, with attendant* LADIES.

NITA. My lady, it draws late.

GIO. Go with her, child.

[*Exeunt* FRANCESCA, NITA *and* LADIES.

GIO. [*To* PAOLO.] You have set a new seal on an ancient love,
Bringing this bride.

PAO. And having brought her, here
My office ends. I'll say farewell to-night.

GIO. This very night!

PAO. I'll go with you to church;
But from the after-feast I ask excuse.

GIO. I do not understand.

PAO. Brother, believe
I do not hasten thus without deep cause.

GIO. Is there such haste indeed?

PAO. Such haste indeed!

GIO. [*Taking his hand.*] Come, Paolo, we two have never held
A mystery between us—tell me out!
Harsh am I, but to you was ever gentle.
What is the special reason of your going?

PAO. The troop for Florence which I mustered here
Should spur at daybreak.

GIO. There is no such haste.
What are you holding from me ?

PAO. Ah, enough !

GIO. What sudden face hath made this hall so dark ?
Come, then, 'tis natural—walk to and fro
And tell me—ah ! some lady you beheld
There at Ravenna in Francesca's train !
Was it not so ?

PAO. Urge me no more to words.

GIO. What woman draws you thus away from me ?

PAO. No woman, brother, draws me from this house.

GIO. You like not then my marriage ! — but indeed,
No marriage can dissolve the bond between us.

Here you are free as ever in the house—
Once more, what is the reason of your going ?

PAO. Brother, 'tis nothing that hath chanced, but rather
That which may chance if here I am detained.

GIO. Darker and yet more dark. Now speak it out.

PAO. I cannot.

GIO. Paolo, this is an ill
Beginning of my marriage, and I loathe
That you should put me off. We three, I thought—
We three together—tempt me not to rage !
And as your elder I command your stay,
Your presence both at church and at the feast.
You would affront Francesca publicly ?

PAO. Giovanni, 'tis enough, I stay. Forgive me.

GIO. Brother, this is our first and last dispute.
Now leave me to these papers. [PAOLO *is going.*]
Paolo,

You go with me heart-whole into this marriage ?
Give me your hand again !

PAO. There is my hand.

[*Exit* PAOLO. GIOVANNI *unfolds papers and reads.*

GIO. " In Pesaro sedition ! Andrea Sarti
Is urgent "——

Enter LUCREZIA. *She touches him on the arm.*

LUC. Pardon me—you sit alone.
While there is time, I have stolen in on you
To speak my dearest wishes for this marriage,
And in a manner, too, old friend, farewell.

GIO. Farewell ?

LUC. And in a manner 'tis farewell.

GIO. This marriage is political.

LUC. No more ?

GIO. And yet since I have seen Francesca, I
Have fallen into a trance. It seems, indeed,
That I am bringing into this dark air

A pureness that shall purge these ancient halls.

LUC. Watch, then, this pureness: fend it fearfully.

GIO. I took her dreaming from her convent trees.

LUC. And for that reason tremble at her more!

Old friend, remember that we two are passed
Into the grey of life: but O, beware
This child scarce yet awake upon the world!
Dread her first ecstasy, if one should come
That should appear to her half-opened eyes
Wonderful as a prince from fairyland
Or venturing through forests toward her face—
No—do not stride about the room—your limp
Is evident the more—come, sit by me
As you were wont to sit. Youth goes toward youth.

GIO. What peril can be here? In Rimini?

LUC. I have but said and say, "Youth goes toward youth,"

And she shall never prize, as I do still,
Your savage courage and deliberate force,
Even your mounded back and sullen gait.

GIO. Lucrezia! this is that old bitterness.

LUC. Bitterness — am I bitter? Strange, O strange!
How else? My husband dead and childless left,
My thwarted woman-thoughts have inward turned,
And that vain milk like acid in me eats.
Have I not in my thought trained little feet
To venture, and taught little lips to move
Until they shaped the wonder of a word?
I am long practised. O those children, mine!
Mine, doubly mine: and yet I cannot touch them,
I cannot see them, hear them—Does great God
Expect I shall clasp air and kiss the wind
For ever? And the budding cometh on,
The burgeoning, the cruel flowering:

At night the quickening splash of rain, at dawn
That muffled call of babes how like to birds;
And I said these sights and sounds must starve—
I, with so much to give, perish of thrift!
Omitted by His casual dew!

Gio. Well, well,
You are spared much: children can wring the heart.

Luc. Spared! to be spared what I was born to have!
I am a woman, and this very flesh
Demands its natural pangs, its rightful throes,
And I implore with vehemence these pains.
I know that children wound us, and surprise
Even to utter death, till we at last
Turn from a face to flowers: but this my heart
Was ready for these pangs, and had foreseen.
O! but I grudge the mother her last look
Upon the coffined form—that pang is rich—

Envy the shivering cry when gravel falls.
And all these maiméd wants and thwarted thoughts,
Eternal yearning, answered by the wind,
Have dried in me belief and love and fear.
I am become a danger and a menace,
A wandering fire, a disappointed force,
A peril—do you hear, Giovanni?—O!
It is such souls as mine that go to swell
The childless cavern cry of the barren sea,
Or make that human ending to night-wind.
Why have I bared myself to you?—I know not,
Unless, indeed, this marriage—yes, this marriage—
Near now, is't not?—So near made me cry out.
Ah! she will bring a sound of pattering feet!
But now this message—and those papers. I
Must haste to see the banquet-table spread—
Your bride is yet so young. [*Exit* LUCREZIA.

GIO. [*Reads.*] "Antonio

And Conti urge it is impolitic
To lay another load" — Youth goes toward youth !—
"On murmuring Pesaro"—in Rimini !—
"Foresee revolt." Here in the house all's safe.

Enter SERVANT, *leading in blind* ANGELA.

SER. My Lord, blind Angela entreats that she
Once more may touch you ere you go to church.

GIO. Give me your hand, old nurse.
[*He kneels.*] Will you not bless me ?
You will not ? And your tears fall down on me ?

ANG. My son, for are you not my very son ?
I gave you milk : from me you sucked in life,
And still my breast is thrilling from your lips.

GIO. Well, well, then !

ANG. So that now my very flesh
Must quail at the approach of woe to you.

GIO. The drops stand on your forehead ! What is this ?

ANG. I never trembled for you till this hour.

GIO. What is it that you fear ?

[*He kisses her hand.*

ANG. Now your lips touch
And I begin to feel more surely, child.
Ah ! but a juice too pure hath now been poured
In a dark ancient wine : and the cup seethes.

GIO. Speak clearer to me.

ANG. Closer lay your head.
Ne'er in the battle have I feared for you.
What is the strange, soft thing which you have brought
Into our life ?

GIO. Francesca, do you mean ?
Why do you clutch my arm ? What is't you see ?

ANG. A kind of twilight struggles through my dark.
Be near me ! Soon it seems that I shall know.

GIO. Upon what scene are those blind eyes so fixed ?

ANG. A place of leaves : and ah ! how still it is !
She sits alone amid great roses.

GIO. She ?

ANG. Who is he that steals in upon your bride ?

GIO. Angela !

ANG. And no sound in all the world !

GIO. What doth he there ?

ANG. He reads out of a book.
There comes a murmuring as of far-off things.
Nearer he drew and kissed her on the lips.

GIO. His face, mother, his face ?

ANG. 'Tis dark again.

GIO. His face ? that I may know him when we meet.

ANG. His face was dim : a twilight struggles back.
I see two lying dead upon a bier—
Slain suddenly, and in each other's arms.

GIO. Are they those two that in the roses kissed ?

ANG. Those two !

GIO. Then quickly tell me of him !

ANG. Ah !

Again 'tis dark. The twilight, as it seemed,
With difficulty came, and might not stay.
My son, art thou still here ?

GIO. Why do your lips
Move fast and yet no words find out their way ?
What are they vainly shaping ?

ANG. Who hath now
Ta'en hold on me ?

GIO. Speak, speak, then !

ANG. He shall be
Not far to seek : yet perilous to find.
Unwillingly he comes a wooing : she
Unwillingly is wooed : yet shall they woo.
His kiss was on her lips ere she was born.

GIO. Who used thy mouth then, and so strangely spoke ?
O, this is folly ! Yet it weighs me down

[*Trumpets are heard.*

ANG. What is that sound?

GIO. My marriage trumpets!

ANG. Here

Still let me sit, and hear the folk pass by.

Enter from one side KINSMEN *and* RETAINERS, PAOLO *at their head.* GIOVANNI *joins him, putting his arm round his neck.*

GIO. Paolo, shall we walk together still?

[*Exit marriage procession of* KINSMEN, *&c., led by* GIOVANNI *and* PAOLO. *Meanwhile enter from the other side* FRANCESCA, LUCREZIA, *and attendant* LADIES. FRANCESCA, *in passing, pauses and offers trinket to* ANGELA, *who shudders, letting it fall. Exeunt all but* ANGELA, *who remains staring before her.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*A Hall in the Palace.*

A week elapses between Acts I. and II.

GIOVANNI *seated with papers;* PAOLO, *in armour, pacing up and down.*

GIO. You chafe to go?

PAO. I languish for the road,
The open road, and chime of mailéd feet.

GIO. And still I marvel at such anxious haste.

PAO. My troop is mustered now: six miles from hence
I take command for Florence.

GIO. Well, I'll urge
Your stay no more; yet I suspect no less.

PAO. What?

GIO. That no soldier-business lures you hence.

PAO. Brother, again!

GIO. I'll laugh at you no more.

[*He rises and speaks slowly.*

I have a deeper cause to wish your stay
Than when I urged it last.

PAO. A deeper cause?

GIO. I have been warned of peril to Francesca.

PAO. Peril!

GIO. Blind Angela in vision saw
One stealing in upon my wife to woo her.
Ah! you, too, start! I am not then the fool
I call myself to be so burdened down—
You too it touches.

PAO. 'Twas a moment's fear.

GIO. [*Taking his hand.*] Such sympathy is ours so close are we,
That what I suffer you straightway must feel.

PAO. What manner, then, of man was he that wooed?

GIO. Ah, there! his face was dim. O, Paolo!

If but a moment I could see it clear,
Look in his eyes as into yours, and know.
Well, this is folly!—can be reasoned off—
And yet it troubles me. Now since I must
Surely be absent on affairs, I could
More easily Francesca leave behind
If you were by her side.

PAO. If I?

GIO. And whom
Than my own brother could I better leave?

PAO. Ah, brother. such a charge I cannot well
Support. If this thing happened by some chance,
I in the house, you absent—'tis a duty
I would not willingly take up.

GIO. See how
You cool to me.

PAO. Set me to any service;
Despatch me into peril—ask my life.
I'll give away my being and breath for you.

Giovanni, you doubt not, you cannot doubt,
My love?

GIO. I must not, else I should go mad,
So dear you are to me.

PAO. And he, this wooer,
If he should wrong Francesca any way
My dagger to his heart were swift as yours.

GIO. I know that well.

Enter FRANCESCA.

Francesca, whence come you?

FRANC. From fostering garden flowers.

GIO. Paolo
Is set on going. I have urged, implored—
He has no answer, only he will go.

Enter a SERVANT *hurriedly.*

SER. A courier, sir, spurred out of Pesaro!

GIO. So I expected! I will come to him.

[*Exit* GIOVANNI *hurriedly and* SERVANT.

FRANC. [*To* PAOLO.] Will you not stay? My husband wishes it—

My husband and your brother—so he speaks
Twice with each word.

PAO. My brother and myself
Have spoken of this, and yet you see I go.

FRANC. If for his sake you will not stay, perhaps
Even for mine you will a little linger.
All here are kind to me, all grave and kind,
But O, I have a fluttering up toward joy,
Lightness and laughter, and a need of singing.
You are more near my age—you understand.
Where are you vulnerable, Paolo?
You are so cased in steel—is't here? or here?
Lay that sad armour by—that steel cuirass.
See, then! I will unloose it with my hands.
I cannot loose it—there's some trick escapes me.

PAO. Francesca, think not I can lightly leave you

And go out from your face into the dark.
Ah! can you think it is not sweet to breathe
That delicate air and flowery sigh of you,
The stealing May and mystery of your spirit?
Am I not flesh and blood?—am I not young?
Is it easy, then, for youth to run from youth?
And yet from you I run. Or are we swift
To fly delight?—And yet from you I fly.
What shall I say?

FRANC. Sweet are your words, but dark.
Is beauty to be dreaded, then, and shunned?

PAO. How shall I tell you and sow in you thoughts
Which are not there as yet?

[*He moves to go.*

FRANC. And you will go?
Will you not say farewell? Will you not kiss
My hand at least? Why do you tremble, then?
Is even the touch of me so full of peril?

PAO. O! of immortal peril!

FRANC. But how strange!
You dread this little hand? O, wonderful!
Your face is white, and yet you have killed men!

PAO. Francesca!

FRANC. Do you fear to look in my eyes,
You so ensteeled and clanging in your stride?
And you could crush my life out with your hand.
O, this new peril that I have about me!

PAO. Child!

FRANC. And this woe that comes from me to men!
And I can stay your going, can I not?
Look up! and with a smile I'll bind you fast.

PAO. Sister, I suffer! now at last farewell!

[*Exit* PAOLO, *tearing himself away.*

FRANC. [*Running to a mirror.*] Where is the glass? O, face unknown and strange!
Slight face, and yet the cause of woe to men!

Enter NITA.

Nita, did any pass you on the stair?

NITA. Lord Paolo came by me, all in steel.

FRANC. Nita, he trembled to look up at me!
And when I nearer came all pale he grew.
And when I smiled he suffered, as it seemed;
And then I smiled again: for it was strange.
Is't wicked such sweet cruelty to use?
O! and that bluer blue—that greener green!

NITA. My Lady, there's no help. And for my sake
Tall men have fought and lost bright blood for me.

[*She looks in the glass.*

We cannot choose; our faces madden men!

FRANC. And yet, Nita, and yet—can any tell
How sorrow first doth come? Is there a step,
A light step, or a dreamy drip of oars?
Is there a stirring of leaves, or ruffle of wings?
For it seems to me that softly, without hand,
Surely she touches me.

NITA. O, such as you
Are from their birth uplifted above sorrow.

FRANC. But am I? am I? Has he left the house?

How far, then, hath he gone by now—how far?
Surely 'tis natural to desire him back—
Most natural—is it not most natural?—Say!
And yet—my heart is wild——

NITA. He is, my Lady,
Your husband's brother.

FRANC. O, I had not thought!
I had not thought! I have sinned, and I am stained! [*She weeps.*

NITA. Lady, you have done nothing.

Enter GIOVANNI, *with* ATTENDANTS; LUCREZIA, *with* LADIES, *to whom she gives directions apart.* GIOVANNI *comes down to* FRANCESCA.

GIO. Could you not
Prevail on him to stay?—he will return.
How beautiful you seem, Francesca, now,
As though new-risen with the bloom of dreams!

More difficult it grows to leave your side.
I, like a miser, run my fingers through
Your hair : yet tears are lately in your eyes !
What little grief perplexes you, my child ?

FRANC. I cannot tell, but suffer me to seek
The Lady Mother of the convent.

GIO. Yet
You shall not stir alone. I have a fear.
[*To* ATTENDANTS.
Follow your mistress, and escort her back.
[*Exit* FRANCESCA, NITA *and escort.* LUCREZIA *dismisses* LADIES *and comes down to* GIOVANNI.

GIO. [*Looking after* FRANCESCA.] The peril, ah ! the peril !

LUC. What is this ?

GIO. Sit, then, and listen. You first sowed in me
The apprehension of Francesca's youth.

LUC. O, I but said——

GIO. Listen! That very hour
Blind Angela, that held me at her breast.
Whose very flesh anticipates my fate,
I found all shivering like a creature dumb.
She clutched my arm, and then, as from the touch,
There came a kind of twilight in her dark,
And in that twilight with blind eyes she saw
One stealing in upon my wife to woo her.

LUC. Ah!

GIO. In a place of leaves they sat and read.
Nearer he drew, and kissed her on the lips.
Again into her dark the twilight came,
And they two lay together on a bier,
Slain ere they knew, and in each other's arms.
These images have so enthralled my brain
I have lived since then in fever.

LUC. But this shadow
That wooed Francesca, and then died with her,
Was nothing more discerned?

GIO. The face was dim.

Luc. But could she give no hint of form or voice?

Gio. I cried — "How shall I know him?" — Then her lips,

After a frantic striving, shaped these words—

"Unwillingly he comes a wooing; she

Unwillingly is wooed: yet shall they woo."

Luc. Unwillingly! This, as it seems, would point——

Gio. [*Starting to his feet.*] Ah! does the scent come to you? Set me on!

Luc. [*Slowly.*] To one who had dear reason not to woo—

To one who owed you much — some ancient friend!

Gio. Fainter again! I know of no such man. Hark back.

Luc. Said she no more, then?

Gio. "He shall be

Not far to seek, yet perilous to find!"

[LUCREZIA *starts.*

What, does the scent come stronger now? You start,

And your eyes glitter——

LUC. [*Going slowly to him and laying her hand on his shoulder.*] Let us hunt this trail!

And yet you will mislike whither it leads.

GIO. Nothing can hold me now.

LUC. "Not far to seek"

Points back to Rimini, this little town,

To one, perhaps, mad for Francesca's face,

That lurks about us.

GIO. Wary now, yet swift!

LUC. Here at our gates, or nearer still.

GIO. Say, say!

LUC. Perhaps, perhaps, within this very house.

GIO. O barren restless woman, at what sight

Do you give cry at last?

LUC. [*Looking into his eyes.*] Are you still eager?

GIO. I shut my eyes and I run into it.

LUC. [*Starting back.*] That crouch as of a beast about to spring!

I dare not, will not, speak till you are calm.

GIO. I am calm [*bending his sword across his knee*]. This steel is true that I can bend it

Into a hoop!

LUC. O, then, if it should be

One that had risen, eaten and drunk with you,

Whose hand was daily in your own!

GIO. Is it?——

LUC. Giovanni! who shall set a shore to love?

When hath it ever swerved from death, or when

Hath it not burned away all barriers,

Even dearest ties of mother and of son,

Even of brothers?——

GIO. [*Seizing her arm.*] Is it Paolo?

LUC. You stop the blood in my arm; release your hold.

GIO. [*Slowly releasing her arm.*]

Ah, gradual nature! let this thought come slow!

Accustom me by merciful degrees

To this idea, which henceforth is my home:

I am strong—yet cannot in one moment think it.

LUC. [*Softly.*] You speak as in a trance.

GIO. Bring me not back!

Like one that walks in sleep, if suddenly

I wake, I die. [*With a cry.*] Paolo! Paolo!

LUC. Giovanni!

GIO. Paolo! ah, no, not there!

Not there, where only I was prone to love!

Beautiful wast thou in the battle, boy!

We came from the same womb, and we have slept

Together in the moonbeams! I have grown

So close to him, my very flesh doth tear!

Why, why, Lucrezia, I have lifted him

Over rough places—he was but a child,

A child that put his hand in mine! I reel—
My little Paolo! [*He swoons off.*
Luc. Help, help! Ah, no!
I must not call—the foam is on his lips,
The veins outstand—and yet I have a joy,
A bitter joy! I'll lay his head down here.
[*She raises his face, and looks into it.*
Thou wast so rich—now thou art poor as I!
His eyes unclose! Master thyself!
Gio. [*Slowly opening his eyes.*] At last!
As to a soul new-come the murk of hell
Grows more accustomed, gradually light,
So I begin to see amid this gloom.
Let me explore the place and walk in it!
[*He rises slowly to his feet.*
We must live on, Lucrezia—we must still
Pace slowly on, and set our teeth until
Relief is sent.
Luc. Can you stand now, Giovanni?
Gio. You are my friend, my solitary friend!

LUC. Am I not lone as you are, without ties ?
Childless and husbandless, yet bitter-true !

GIO. Be with me still—if Paolo it is !
Henceforward let no woman bear two sons.
Yet, wherefore should he go ?

LUC. He feared, perhaps.

GIO. He too, then, feared—and went.

LUC. Now he is gone,
There's breathing time at least.

GIO. Can I not bind
Her beauty fast o'er which I 'gin to yearn ?
Are there not drugs to charm the hearts of women ?

LUC. Put her to sleep, and so ensure her faith—
Yet, then, she'll dream.

GIO. If Paolo it is !

LUC. Lean upon me, Giovanni ; you are weak.

[*Exeunt both, slowly.*

SCENE II.—*A Wayside Inn out of Rimini.*

View of Rimini in distance, towers flushed with sunset.

Enter MARCO *and other* SOLDIERS, MIRRA *and other* GIRLS, *a* SERGEANT.

A SOLDIER. What! Are we all to say good-bye here, then?

A GIRL. We can come no further out of Rimini.

ANOTHER SOLDIER. We must all have a kiss before we go.

ANOTHER GIRL. Ah! you are ready to kiss us, and you are ready to go.

SOLDIER. That is the soldier's life.

GIRL. To love and go away? Yes, we know you.

MAR. To love and go, and love again, to fight and love again, and go—a good life. too.

A GIRL. Listen to him! He tells us he will love some one else. Well, we have all had a merry time.

MAR. So we have; but the world is large. Little Mirra here is not the first or the last.

[*They laugh.*

A SOLDIER. One last cup of wine all round.

MAR. Come, Mirra, we'll drink together out of this cup. Here's your health, sweetheart, and many other lovers to you.

A GIRL. Ah! he knows life is short. Isn't he a pretty fellow?

MAR. [*Sings.*]

O I love not, I, the long road and the march,
With the chink, chink, chinking, and the parch.
But I love the little town that springs in sight
At the falling of the day, with many a light.
It is sweet! it is sweet—
(Chorus) Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

To clatter down the pebbly street,
When the taverns all are humming,
And the lads in front are drumming,
And the windows fill with girls,
All laughing, and all shaking down their curls.

(Chorus) Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

Then your armour's all unlaced,
And your arm is round a waist:
And she seems so much afraid,
You could swear she was a maid——

SERGEANT. [*Interrupting.*] Come, lads, give the girls the slip: your duty! We must start again.

MIR. [*Clinging to* MARCO.] You will come back again, won't you, Marco?

MAR. May and may not, Mirra. Who can tell?

MIR. Because—because——

A GIRL. Look at her—she's crying! Why, he was only playing with you.

MIR. I know, I know.

A GIRL. And they say his play has ended in some earnest.

ANOTHER GIRL. Well, what then? Fools must go their own way.

MAR. Good-bye, girls: we have had a merry time.

GIRLS. Good-bye, good-bye! [*All exeunt.*

Enter CORRADO, VALENTINO, LUIGI *and* PAOLO.

COR. Here's an inn—the first since Rimini. Bring us some wine.

PAO. How straight the road is from here to Rimini! One can see the town at the end.

VAL. Yes, and your brother's castle. [*Enter* LANDLORD *with wine.*] Come, Lord Paolo, some wine. Why so dull?

PAO. It is that old wound pains me.

COR. [*Drinking.*] Come, lad, out with it! Is it a debt or a wench? Let me talk with him. [*Goes*

over to PAOLO.] I can advise you, Paolo. I have loved more, owed more, drunk more, and lived more. Confess to me!

LUI. Who would not to so easy a priest?

VAL. [*To* CORRADO.] Still staring down the road.

COR. [*Whispering.*] I have it, then.

VAL. Corrado says that when a man sits down outside an inn and refuses wine, and stares back along the road he came, he is in love.

COR. Didn't you observe one of those girls as we passed them, crying? Shame, Paolo! and in your own town, too!

LUI. He doesn't hear us.

COR. Well, here's a health to her, whoever she is! Now, Paolo, let me speak to you. I have myself so often felt this—give me a word.

VAL. Pang!

COR. Pang—yes, pang!

LUI. So often?

Cor. More times than I can count. Why, man, I have thriven on pangs. There was the landlord's wife at Ancona; there was the little black-eyed girl out of Florence. To look at me, you would scarcely suppose that I have left half the cities of Italy sighing behind me. I have suffered, and I have inflicted. There was——

Lui. O, Corrado! Not these old stories.

Cor. Well, the fruit of all this! You must know that love is a thing physical. It can be sweated out of a man by hard riding; it evaporates from the body like any humour.

Val. Ha! ha!

Cor. My advice is this—fill up, drink, and get to fighting quickly; and if, after a bottle or so, you have taken a girl on your knee in the twilight—Why Paolo! consider you have left behind you, perhaps, another soldier for your brother's wars. You have done a brotherly act, and——

PAO. [*Rising.*] Corrado, we have been fast comrades, and I think you know me; but another word of this and there will be an end of talk between us—you understand?

COR. O! ho!

VAL. I tell you—you see, it is one of those serious matters, where the spirit is more concerned than the flesh. Come, Paolo, let us have it!

COR. Before he begins, I think it would be more fitting if we uncovered our heads, for the recitation is likely to be solemn.

LUI. Come, come, we must be going!

COR. God send us another inn soon.

[*Exeunt* CORRADO *and* VALENTINO.

LUI. Give me your hand, Paolo—you know me. Tell me the trouble.

PAO. I cannot, Luigi.

LUI. Have you fallen out with your brother? You and he were such friends.

PAO. No.

LUI. Is it the young wife that he has married, and now he seems more cold to you? But this is natural at first. How can I help you?

PAO. No one can help me, Luigi.

LUI. Up, and lead us on, then!

PAO. I will catch you in a moment.

LUI. I am very sorry, Paolo. [*Exit* LUIGI.

PAO. I have fled from her; have refused the rose,
Although my brain was reeling at the scent.
I have come hither as through pains of death;
I have died, and I am gazing back at life.
Yet now it were so easy to return,
And run down the white road to Rimini!
And might I not return? [*He starts up and looks at the towers, red with sunset.*] Those battlements
Are burning! they catch fire, those parapets!
And through the blaze doth her white face look out

Like one forgot, yet possible to save.
Might I not then return? Ah, no! no! no!
For I should tremble to be touched by her,
And dread the music of her mere good-night.
Howe'er I sentinelled my bosom, yet
That moment would arrive when instantly
Our souls would flash together in one flame,
And I should pour this torrent in her ear
And suddenly catch her to my heart.

[*A drum is heard.*

A drum!

O, there is still a world of men for a man!
I'll lose her face in flashing brands, her voice
In charging cries: I'll rush into the war!

[SOLDIERS *pass across the stage. Seeing* PAOLO, *they cheer and call him by name—then exeunt. He makes to follow, then stops.*

I cannot go; thrilling from Rimini,
A tender voice makes all the trumpets mute.

I cannot go from her: may not return.
O God! what is Thy will upon me? Ah!
One path there is, a straight path to the dark.
There, in the ground, I can betray no more,
And there for ever am I pure and cold.
The means! No dagger blow, nor violence shown
Upon my body to distress her eyes.
Under some potion gently will I die;
And they that find me dead shall lay me down
Beautiful as a sleeper at her feet.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 1.—*The shop of* PULCI, *late evening. The walls and ceiling are hung with skins, sharks' teeth, crucibles, wax figures, crystals, charms, &c. A counter, at which* TESSA *stands. As the scene opens figures are seen leaving the shop. Three* PEASANT GIRLS *and a* LADY'S MAID *remain.*

TESSA. I must ask you to choose quickly. It is past the hour for closing the shop.

1ST GIRL. And will this syrup keep Antonio faithful ?

TESSA. Two drops of this in anything he drinks, given every seven days, and he will have no eyes but for you.

1ST GIRL. But will it keep his thoughts true while I am away ?

TESSA. Wherever he may be his thoughts will be for you.

1st GIRL. Ah, but you don't know Antonio. He is so easily led off—any face if it is fresh—any fool with bright eyes.

TESSA. These drops will keep even Antonio faithful.

1st GIRL. I'll take it, then: it must be a wonderful syrup. [*Exit* 1st GIRL.

TESSA. [*To* MAID.] And you?

MAID. I wondered how long I was to be made to wait for these common chattering wenches. I want another packet of that face-bloom for my mistress, and a darker shade. The other makes her appear hectic.

TESSA. This, then, has a darker tinge.

MAID. And you are to tell your father that the dye he sent withers her hair. He must add more oil.

TESSA. I will tell him. Good-night.

MAID. Good-night to you. [*Exit* MAID.

2nd GIRL. [*Holding out charm.*] What is this charm?

TESSA. It will ensure you against ague, fever, or infection, and not only this, but against peril of any kind. It is worn round the neck, and at the approach of danger it will tremble and give you a sign.

2nd GIRL. O, I must have that. Will this money be enough to-day if I bring the rest next week?

TESSA. If the charm is not paid for soon it will lose its power. Take it, and remember.

[*Exit* 2nd GIRL.

Now you—quickly, please—what do you want?

3rd GIRL. I want a cure for love. Are they very expensive?

TESSA. We have some that will cure of love in a few hours; but these will cost you a great deal.

3d GIRL. It is terrible not to be able to sleep at nights.

TESSA. Here is one that will bring you back sleep, and cure you entirely in a few weeks—one that you could afford.

3rd GIRL. I don't think I want to be cured entirely—and yet one never knows what one may come to when it grows late and there is music and dancing. It is hard to resist under the moon.

TESSA. Come, now—will you take it?

3rd GIRL. [*Taking phial.*] I think I'll have it, and take it very slowly.

TESSA. There, then!

3rd GIRL. There's money saved for six weeks. Ah, well!

[*Exit* 3rd GIRL. TESSA, *after barring up door, goes to glass.*

TESSA. Now I can play for awhile. [*She puts some bloom on her face.*] O, but this bloom is beautiful! And how it makes one's eyes

sparkle! Now this red salve for the lips—that is just what I lacked. My lips are too pale—but now! Where is that pencil? Here. Shall I lengthen my eyebrows, curving them so? No: I will only deepen them. There, then! [*She walks up and down before a glass, then sits dejectedly.*] Yet what is the use of all this? I am never seen, may not stir into the streets. And I want to be seen, and hear music and——

PUL. [*Entering down the stairs with a lighted brazier.*] Tessa!

TESSA. Yes, father.

PUL. Have I not forbidden you to touch these powders?

TESSA. Ah, but look at me, father. Am I always to stay shut up here, where no one comes but maids of fine ladies and girls from the shops?

PUL. My child, we must be patient a little

longer. Listen! Soon we shall be rich, and then we will fly Rimini, and far from here we will have a palace— [*A knock.*] Tessa, go to your room instantly.

TESSA. [*Lingering.*] May I not stay and see who it is?

PUL. It is only some lady's-maid.

TESSA. No, father, I think it is a gentleman.

PUL. Quickly! Quickly!

[*Exit* TESSA. PULCI *puts out light and lights a lamp; he slowly unbars the door. Enter* GIOVANNI, *masked and cloaked.* PULCI *closes door after him.*

PUL. Has no one seen you enter, sir?

GIO. No one.

PUL. Softly! What do you seek?

GIO. Some dreamy potion
That can enthral a woman's wandering heart
And all her thought subdue to me.

PUL. [*Producing phial.*] This poured
In her night drink will woo her to your arms.
One amorous night at least it will procure.

GIO. One night!—what use of that? Each day, each night
Must she be mine.

PUL. But one more drug I have—
[*Searches for another phial.*

GIO. [*Aside.*] I must beguile, it seems, my wedded wife,
And lure into my arms what is my own.

PUL. [*Offering another phial.*] This, then, will purchase some infatuate days.

GIO. Some days!

PUL. No tincture longer holds the blood.

GIO. Here is a purse. [*Throws purse of coins.*

PUL. Ah! get you quickly gone.
[*As they approach the door a knock is heard.*
See! I will slowly now unbar the door,

And whoso enters past him slip away
Into the night.

GIO. [*Stops* PULCI.] I must not meet a stranger.
[*Takes off mask.*
Hither! look on my face.

PUL. [*Falling on his knees.*] Mercy, great Lord!
Take not my life—this commerce after hours
Is for my child.

GIO. Hide me, and instantly.

PUL. [*Hiding him behind the arras.*] Here, then. [*Another knock.*] And, sir, secrets of Rimini
And unsuspected movings of your subjects
You can o'erhear. I'll draw him on to speak—
Only stir not. [*Unbars door; enter* PAOLO.] Warily, sir.

PAO. Old man——

GIO. Paolo's voice!

PAO. What is that sound? This business
Is for no other ear but yours.

PUL. If any stirred
It was my child preparing her for bed.

PAO. If any hear me, it were ill for him!
Old man, there is within this purse a calm
Decline for thee to death, and quiet hours.
Take it, and give me in exchange some drug
That can fetch down on us the eternal sleep,
Anticipating the slow mind of God.

PUL. Is this thing for thyself, or for another?

PAO. 'Tis for myself!

PUL. I will not sell to murder.
But unto any weary of their life
I sell a painless issue out of it.
Yet you are young!

PAO. Think you the old would die?
At any cost they would prolong the light.
'Tis we, in whose pure blood the fever takes,
Newly inoculate with violent life,
'Tis we who are so mad to die.

PUL. 'Tis true

I would not lose a moment of the sun.
What hath so early ruined you ?

PAO. Old sir,
I am on my death-bed, and to you confess,—
Love, where to love is extreme treachery—
Love for another's wife.

PUL. Nothing so strange.

PAO. Yes, for she is my brother's wife—my sister.

GIO. [*Aside.*] Thou hast said it !

PAO. O, I cannot near her bide
But infinite her lightest whisper grows.
There's peril in the rustling of her dress.

PUL. And are you, too, beloved ?

PAO. She hath said no word,
But should I stay, she would catch fire from me.

PUL. Why all's before you—yet you yield up breath.

PAO. I cannot go from her ; I must not stay.
To die is left !

PUL. For such a drug the price——

PAO. Usher me to oblivion!

[*Shows purse with gold.*

PUL. [*Reaching down phial.*] This drunk off
Within an hour will terminate thy woe.

PAO. [*Taking phial which* PULCI *hands him.*]
Unbar the door! How the night rushes in!

[*Exit* PAOLO.

PUL. [*To* GIOVANNI.] I'll follow him. If suddenly he drink
He must not fall and lie too near my door.

[*Exit* PULCI.

GIO. [*Coming from behind arras.*] All doubt at last is o'er! He hath said it out!
Almost I had my dagger in his heart!
Yet sooner than betray, he is gone to death.
[*Wildly.*] I cannot have thee die, my Paolo!
Perhaps even now he drinks: even now the phial
Touches his lips—ah. brother, dash it down!

How much, then, hast thou drunk? Not yet enough—
Not yet enough—I know—for death? Which way
Went he—I'll follow him. [*Rushes to door, then pauses.*] Yet, O my God!
It must be so! How else? He is so bound
To her, he cannot fly!—he must not stay!
He has gone out upon the only road.
And this is my relief! O dread relief!
Thus only am I pure of brother's blood!
I must be still while he goes out to die!—
And yet be still—while he who is most dear
Drinks poison—yet I must be very still!

Re-enter PULCI.

PUL. I watched till he was mingled with the night.

GIO. Tell me! Is he that's gone so sure to die?

PUL. Within an hour, so potent is the drug!
[*Fawning on* GIO.] You on more pleasant business
came to me.
We who are older at such madness laugh.
GIO. I stifle here!
PUL. Tyrant of Rimini!
You will not kill me?
GIO. Till to-morrow night
I stay my hand. Which way went he—that
fool?
PUL. Straight on; he never turned until I lost
him. [*Exit* GIOVANNI.
Tessa!
TESSA. [*Running in.*] Yes, father.
PUL. Now you have your wish;
To-morrow must we run from Rimini.
TESSA. To-morrow night the world then—
the bright world!
[PULCI *pours the gold out on the counter.*

SCENE II.—*A lane outside the wall of the castle garden, postern door in the wall.*

Enter PAOLO.

PAO. There is no other means: but ah, the pain!
Here is the garden where her lattice shines.
Perchance she looks toward me now, and makes
A music upon midnight with my name.
Perchance she leans into the air and sighs.
O! now is she attired in purest white,
Hanging above our heads 'twixt earth and heaven!
Life, life! I cannot leave thee, for she lives.
At least I must behold her before death;
And go straight from her face into the grave—
Straight from her touch at least into the ground.
Much is permitted to a man condemned.
I'll see her, hear her, touch her ere I die.

[*Exit* PAOLO *through postern door into the gardens.*

Enter two COURIERS *hastily with torches.*

1st COUR. Which way now?

2nd COUR. Stay, I am out of breath.

1st COUR. At such a moment, that Lord Malatesta cannot be found!

2nd COUR. I must get my breath against this door. Have you the papers?

1st COUR. Here. Lately married, yet out of his bed at this hour!

2nd COUR. Ah, I wish I were back with——

1st COUR. Hush! here is Carlo.

Enter CARLO.

Well, no sign of him?

CAR. None.

And I am aguish, and these night dews!

1st COUR. Stay!

CAR. What?

1st COUR. Listen! I tell you.

2nd Cour. A step!

Car. It is he, Lord Malatesta.

Enter Giovanni *slowly.*

Car. Great lord, we have pursued you up and down. Here's news that will not stay.

[*Gives him letter.*

Gio. Hold the torch nearer. [*Reads.*] "Tyrant of Rimini! All Pesaro is risen against the tax laid on them. Our men are beaten behind the city walls—the city itself declares for Cosimo. We wait but for you; a noise of your coming—a sight of you—and the city will fall to us again. Linger not a moment.—Andrea." Carlo, muster every man within call. Then to the palace—saddle my horse. Summon all in the house to follow you: rouse them from their beds; they must ride with me instantly.

[*Exeunt* Carlo *and* Couriers. *Enter running two* Messengers *from other side.*

A MESSENGER. Lord and tyrant of Rimini! We are come on you none too soon—we are ridden from the camp—our horses stand—there was no moment to write, but this by word of mouth: "Your garrison makes terms with the enemy: many are already gone over, and we fear for San Arcangelo and the whole province."

GIO. Get a cup of wine, both of you, and be prepared to ride with me within the half-hour. I'll fall like thunder on Pesaro, and catch San Arcangelo with the wind of it. [*Exit one* MESSENGER. GIOVANNI *to the other.*] Stay you, sir! and tell me more exactly as we hurry on. Where is Andrea now, then? There is a vantage-ground just out of Pesaro, and there——

[*Exeunt* GIOVANNI *and* MESSENGER.

SCENE III.—*An Arbour in the Castle Gardens. Dawn beginning to break.*

Enter FRANCESCA *with a book,* NITA *following with lamp.*

FRANC. I cannot sleep, Nita; I will read here.
Is it dawn yet? [NITA *sets lamp down.*

NITA. No, lady: yet I see
A flushing in the East.

FRANC. How still it is!

NITA. This is the stillest time of night or day.

FRANC. Know you why, Nita?

NITA. No, my lady.

FRANC. Now
Day in a breathless passion kisses night,
And neither speaks.

NITA. Shall I stay here?

FRANC. Ah, no!
Perhaps in the dawn silence I shall drowse.
If not, I'll read this legend to myself.

NITA. Is it a pretty tale ?

FRANC. Pretty, ah no !

Nita ; but beautiful and passing sad.

NITA. I love sad tales : though I am gay, I love

Sometimes to weep. But is it of our time ?

FRANC. It is an ancient tale of two long dead.

NITA. O, 'tis a tale of love !

FRANC. Of love, indeed.

But, Nita, leave me to myself : I think

I would have no one stirring near me now.

[*Exit* NITA.

The light begins, but he is far away.

[*She walks to and fro.*

Better than tossing in that vacant room

Is this cool air and fragrance ere the dawn.

Where is the page which I had reached ? Ah, here !

Now let me melt into an ancient woe.

[*Begins to read. Enter* PAOLO, *softly.*

PAO. Francesca !

FRANC. Paolo! I thought you now
Gone into battle dim, far, far away.

PAO. And seems it strange that I should come, then?

FRANC. No,
It seems that it could not be otherwise.

PAO. I went indeed; but some few miles from hence
Turned, and could go no further. All this night
About the garden have I roamed and burned.
And now, at last, sleepless and without rest,
I steal to you.

FRANC. Sleepless and without rest!

PAO. It seemed that I must see your face again,
Then nevermore; that I must hear your voice,
And then no more; that I must touch your hand,
Once. No one stirs within the house; no one
In all this world but you and I, Francesca.
We two have to each other moved all night.

FRANC. I moved not to you, Paolo.

PAO. But night
Guided you on, and onward beckoned me.
What is that book you read? Now fades the last
Star to the East: a mystic breathing comes:
And all the leaves once quivered, and were still.

FRANC. It is the first, the faint stir of the dawn.

PAO. So still it is that we might almost hear
The sigh of all the sleepers in the world.

FRANC. And all the rivers running to the sea.

PAO. What is't you read?

FRANC. It is an ancient tale.

PAO. Show it to me. Is it some drowsy page
That reading low I might persuade your eyes
At last to sleep?

FRANC. It is the history
Of two who fell in love long years ago;
And wrongly fell.

PAO. How wrongly?

FRANC. Because she
Already was a wife, and he who loved
Was her own husband's dear familiar friend.

PAO. Was it so long ago?

FRANC. So long ago.

PAO. What were their famous and unlucky names?

FRANC. Men called him Launcelot, her Guenevere.

Here is the page where I had ceased to read.

PAO. [*Taking book.*] Their history is blotted with new tears.

FRANC. The tears are mine: I know not why I wept.

But these two were so glad in their wrong love:
It was their joy; it was their helpless joy.

PAO. Shall I read on to you where you have paused?

FRANC. Here is the place: but read it low and sweet.

Put out the lamp! [PAOLO *puts out the lamp.*

PAO. The glimmering page is clear.

[*Reading.*] "Now on that day it chanced that Launcelot,

Thinking to find the King, found Guenevere

Alone; and when he saw her whom he loved,

Whom he had met too late, yet loved the more;

Such was the tumult at his heart that he

Could speak not, for her husband was his friend,

His dear familiar friend: and they two held

No secret from each other until now;

But were like brothers born"—my voice breaks off.

Read you a little on.

FRANC. [*Reading.*] "And Guenevere,

Turning, beheld him suddenly whom she

Loved in her thought, and even from that hour

When first she saw him; for by day, by night,

Though lying by her husband's side, did she
Weary for Launcelot, and knew full well
How ill that love, and yet that love how deep!"
I cannot see—the page is dim: read you.

PAO. [*Reading.*] "Now they two were alone, yet could not speak;
But heard the beating of each other's hearts.
He knew himself a traitor but to stay,
Yet could not stir: she pale and yet more pale
Grew till she could no more, but smiled on him.
Then when he saw that wished smile, he came
Near to her and still near, and trembled; then
Her lips all trembling kissed."

FRANC. [*Drooping towards him.*] Ah, Launcelot! [*He kisses her on the lips.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

A Chamber in the Palace—late evening of the second day after GIOVANNI'S *departure.*

GIOVANNI *discovered, stained as from hard riding.* CARLO *and* RETAINERS *attending him. Wine on table.*

GIO. The Lady Lucrezia—is she in the house?

CAR. She is, sir.

GIO. Tell her that I am returned,
And ask some words with her. Well why, do you
Stand bursting with some news that you must tell?
What sudden thing has happened?

CAR. Nothing, sir.

GIO. Nothing? You then that huddle all together,
Like cattle against thunder—what hath chanced?

AN ATTENDANT. I know of nothing, sir.

2nd ATTEN. Nor I.

3rd ATTEN. Nor I.

GIO. Leave me and take my message!

[*Exeunt* CARLO *and* ATTENDANTS.

Lies he so
Quiet that none hath found him? They are driven
Out from the city and are fugitives.
Ne'er did I strike and hew as yesterday,
And that armed ghost of Paolo by me rode.

[*He pours out wine and drinks.*

Enter LUCREZIA.

LUC. So soon returned, Giovanni?

GIO. A few hours'
Fast fighting ended it, Lucrezia.

What news at home?

LUC. O, Paolo is returned!

GIO. Paolo returned! What, from the grave?

LUC. The grave?

GIO. I left him dead, or going to his death.

LUC. What do you mean?

GIO. I heard from his own mouth
That he and she did for each other burn.

LUC. He told you?

GIO. No, not me: but yet I heard.

LUC. And you on the instant killed him?

GIO. No, he stole
Away to die: I thought him dead: 'twere better.
Now like a thief he creeps back to the house!
To her for whom I had begun to long
So late in life that now I may not cease
From longing!

LUC. Her that you must drug to kiss!
Will you not smell the potion in her sigh?
A few more drops, then what a mad caress!

GIO. He hath crept back like a thief into the house—

A thief—a liar—he feigned the will to die.
Lucrezia, when old Angela foretold,
I feared not him: when he was pointed at,
I doubted still: even after his own words,
Then, then had I forgiven him, for he
Went out as to a grave. But now I am changed—
I will be wary of this creeping thing.
O, I have no emotion now, no blood.
No longer I postpone or fight this doom:
I see that it must be, and I am grown
The accomplice and the instrument of Fate,
A blade! a knife!—no more.

LUC. He has been here
Since yestermorn.

GIO. Yet I'll be no assassin,
Or rashly kill: I have not seen them kiss.
I'll wait to find them in each other's arms,
And stab them there enfolded and entwined,

And so to all men justify my deed.
Yet how to find them where to kill is just?

LUC. Give out that this is no return, but merely
An intermission of the war: that you
Must ride back to the camp within the hour,
And for some days be absent: he and she
Will seize upon the dark and lucky hour
To be together: watch you round the house,
And suddenly take them in each other's arms.

GIO. This plan commends itself to my cold heart.

LUC. Here comes Francesca. Shall I stay, then?

GIO. Stay!

Enter FRANCESCA.

FRANC. Sir, you have asked for me. I did not know
You were so soon returned.

GIO. Soldiers' returns

Are sudden and oft unexpected.

FRANC. Sir,

How pale you are! You are not wounded?

GIO. No!

A scratch perhaps. Give me some wine, Fran
cesca,

For suddenly I must be gone again.

FRANC. I thought this broil was ended?

GIO. No! not yet

Some days I may be absent, and can go

More lightly since I leave you not alone.

To Paolo I commend you, to my brother.

Loyal he is to me, loyal and true.

He has also a gaiety of mind

Which I have ever lacked: he is beside

More suited to your years, can sing and play,

And has the art long hours to entertain.

To him I leave you, and must go forthwith.

[*He makes to go, then turns.*

Come here, Francesca, kiss me—yet not so,

You put your lips up to me like a child.

FRANC. 'Tis not so long ago I was a child.

[*Seizing his arm.*

O sir, is it wise, is it well to go away?

GIO. What do you mean?

FRANC. I have a terror here.

GIO. Can you not bear to part with me some hours?

FRANC. I dread to be alone: I fear the night
And yon great chamber, the resort of spirits.
I see men hunted on the air by hounds:
Thin faces of your house, with weary smiles.
The dead who frown I fear not: but I fear
The dead who smile! The very palace rocks,
Remembering at midnight, and I see
Women within these walls immured alive
Come starving to my bed and ask for food.

GIO. Take some one then to sleep with you—Lucrezia,
Or little Nita else: lie not alone.

FRANC. [*Still detaining him.*] Yet go not, sir.

GIO. What is it that you fear?

FRANC. Sir, go not, go not!

GIO. Child, I cannot stay

For fancies, and at once I'll say farewell

To both of you. I hear my courser fret.

[*Exit* GIOVANNI.

FRANC. [*Looking after him, and turning slowly.*]

Lucrezia, will you lie with me to-night?

LUC. I will, Francesca, if you'll have it so.

FRANC. O, some one I can touch in the thick night!—

What sound is that?

LUC. [*Going to window.*] Your husband galloping

Away into the dark [*She looks from the window, then turns*]: now he is gone.

I left young Paolo pacing up and down;

[*Looking steadfastly at her.*

He seemed as faint for company as you.

Say, shall I call him in as I go out?

He will help waste the tardy time.

FRANC. [*Quickly.*] No, no!

LUC. Is there some little feud 'twixt you and him?

For when you meet words slowly come to you—

You scarce look in each other's eyes.

FRANC. No feud.

LUC. Remember, when Giovanni married you

These two were to each other all in all;

And so excuse some natural jealousy

Of you from him.

FRANC. I think he means me well.

LUC. Then shall I call him in?

FRANC. O, why so eager?

Where would all those about me drive me? First

My husband earnestly to Paolo

Commends me; and now you must call him in.

[*Wildly*] Where can I look for pity? Lucrezia,

You have no children?

LUC. None.

FRANC. Nor ever had?

LUC. Nor ever had.

FRANC. But yet you are a woman.

I have no mother: let me be your child
To-night: I am so utterly alone!
Be gentle with me; or if not, at least
Let me go home; this world is difficult.
O, think of me as of a little child
That looks into your face, and asks your hand.

[LUCREZIA *softly touches* FRANCESCA'S *hair.*]

Why do you touch my head? Why do you weep?
I would not pain you.

LUC. Ah, Francesca! You
Have touched me where my life is quivering most.
I have no child: and yet if I had borne one
I could have wished her hair had been this colour.

FRANC. I am too suddenly cast in this whirl!
Too suddenly! I had but convent thoughts.

O woman, woman, take me to you and hold me!

[*She throws herself into* LUCREZIA'S *arms.*

LUC. [*Clasping* FRANCESCA *to her.*] At last the long ice melts, and O relief
Of rain that rushes from me! Child, my child!
I clasp you close, close—do you fear me still?
Have you not heard love is more fierce than hate?
Roughly I grasp what I have hunted long.
You cannot know—how should you?—that you are
More, so much more, to me than just a child.

FRANC. I seem to understand a little.

LUC. Close,
I hold you close: it was not all in vain,
The holy babble and pillow kissed all o'er!
O my embodied dream with eyes and hair!
Visible aspiration with soft hands;
Tangible vision! O, art thou alive,
Francesca, dost thou move and breathe? Speak, speak!

Say human words out, lest thou vanish quite!
Your very flesh is of my sighs composed,
Your blood is crimson with my passioning!
And now I have conceived and have brought forth;
And I exult in front of the great sun:
And I laugh out with riches in my lap!
And you will deem me mad! but do not, Sweet:
I am not mad, only I am most happy.
I'll dry my tears—but O, if thou should'st die?
[*Aside.*] And ah my God!

FRANC. Why did you start?

LUC. [*Aside.*] To stay him!

[*To* FRANCESCA, *taking her hands.*] But I should be the shadow of a mother
If here I ceased. Francesca, I well know
That 'twixt bright Paolo and dark Giovanni
You stand—you hinted at some peril there.
I ask to know no more: but take these words—
Be not in company with Paolo

To-night. [*Aside.*] Giovanni must be found. My child,
I have some business on the moment, but
Within the hour I will return—— [*Aside.*] How find him?
And sleep with you—— [*Aside.*] I'll search all secret places.
Kiss me. Remember, then! [*Aside.*] 'Tis not too late!
What meshes have I woven for what I love?

[*Exit* LUCREZIA.

Enter NITA *on the other side, with a lamp.*

NITA. Lady, shall I come in?

FRANC. Set the lamp here,
Nita, and take some sewing: I am alone
To-night, and you shall sit with me until
Lucrezia is returned. What lamp is that?

NITA. It is the same I set you in the arbour
That night you could not sleep.

FRANC. Yes, I remember.

NITA. Are you unhappy, mistress ?

FRANC. I am lonely,

Nita, most lonely.

NITA. That were easily—

Pardon the saying, mistress—remedied.

FRANC. And how ?

NITA. If I myself were married young,

Perhaps without my leave to some old man,

And found a younger gallant in the house,

I think I would not shun him.

FRANC. Well, say on.

NITA. No ! And I think I would maintain some show

Of love to my grey husband : it is easy

To keep in humour an old man—a kiss

A little look, a word will satisfy,

And I would have my pleasure.

FRANC. I have listened

So far to you : you do not understand.

O Nita, when we women sin, 'tis not
By art; it is not easy, it is not light;
It is an agony shot through with bliss:
We sway and rock and suffer ere we fall.

[*She walks up and down.*

NITA. I scarcely understand, my lady. I
Am ever gay, and this is a gay world;
And if we girls are prudent but a little,
'Tis easy to enjoy. [*A knock.*

FRANC. Who knocked, then? See!

NITA [*Going to door and returning.*] It is Lord Paolo who asks for you.

FRANC. Tell him I cannot see him. Is he gone?

NITA. Yes, and so sad! He sighed so [*sighs*], and he went.

Shall I now call him back?

FRANC. No, no! Sit down.
[*Speaking quickly.*] Tell me some story, Nita.

NITA. Alas! I cannot:

Only the village talk I can repeat,
And how——

FRANC. [*Starting.*] Listen! What step is that without?

A sad step, and it goeth to and fro.
Look out!

NITA. It is Lord Paolo, my lady.

FRANC. [*Quickly.*] Come from the window [*Aside.*] O where tarries she,
This new-found mother? Tell me then this tale!

NITA. Lucía, my sister, has a lover whom
She thought so true: but he the other night——

FRANC. Listen again!

PAO. [*Without.*] Francesca!

NITA. Tis his voice!
My lady, you are trembling!

FRANC. [*Aside.*] Why did he
Speak? The sweet sound has floated to my brain.

PAO. Francesca!

FRANC. [*Aside.*] Soft it comes out of the night.
Go to the window, Nita. What says he ?

NITA. He does entreat he may come in to you
A moment. Shall I answer ?

FRANC. [*Walking to and fro and putting her hand to her heart.*] Let him come.

NITA. I will go tell him. [*Aside.*] They'll not want me : I
Can meet Bernardo now. [*Exit* NITA.

FRANC. O voice too sweet !
And like the soul of midnight sending words !
Now all the world is at her failing hour,
And at her faintest : now the pulse is low !
Now the tide turns, and now the soul goes home !
And I to Paolo am fainting back !
A moment—but a moment—then no more !

Enter PAOLO.

PAO. I am by music led into this room,
And beckoned sweetly : all the breezes die

Round me, and in immortal ecstasy
Toward thee I move: now am I free and gay—
Light as a dancer when the strings begin.

FRANC. What glow is on thy face, what sudden light?

PAO. It seems that I am proof against all perils.

FRANC. And yet I fear to see thy air so glad.

PAO. To-night all points of swords to me are dull.

FRANC. And still I dread the bravery of your words.

Kiss me, and leave me, Paolo, to-night.

PAO. What do you fear?

FRANC. One watches quietly.

PAO. Who?

FRANC. I know not: perhaps the quiet face
Of God: the eternal Listener is near.

PAO. I'll struggle now no more. Have I not fought
Against thee as a foe most terrible?

Parried the nimble thrust and thought of thee,
And from thy mortal sweetness fled away,
Yet evermore returned? Now all the bonds
Which held me I cast off—honour, esteem,
All ties, all friendships, peace, and life itself.
You only in this universe I want.

FRANC. You fill me with a glorious rashness. What!
Shall we two, then, take up our fate and smile?

PAO. Remember how when first we met we stood
Stung with immortal recollections.
O face immured beside a fairy sea,
That leaned down at dead midnight to be kissed!
O beauty folded up in forests old!
Thou wast the lovely quest of Arthur's knights——

FRANC. Thy armour glimmered in a gloom of green.

PAO. Did I not sing to thee in Babylon?

FRANC. Or did we set a sail in Carthage Bay ?

PAO. Were thine eyes strange ?

FRANC. Did I not know thy voice ?
All ghostly grew the sun, unreal the air
Then when we kissed.

PAO. And in that kiss our souls
Together flashed, and now they are one flame,
Which nothing can put out, nothing divide.

FRANC. Kiss me again ! I smile at what may chance.

PAO. Again, and yet again ! and here and here.
Let me with kisses burn this body away,
That our two souls may dart together free.
I fret at intervention of the flesh,
And I would clasp you—you that but inhabit
This lovely house.

FRANC. Break open then the door,
And let my spirit out. Paolo, kill me !
Then kill thyself : to vengeance leave these weeds,
And let our souls together soar away.

PAO. [*Recoiling.*] You are too beautiful for human
blow. [FRANCESCA *starts.*
Why did you shiver and turn sudden cold?
FRANC. [*Slowly.*] I felt a wind pass over me.
PAO. I too:
Colder than any summer night could give.
FRANC. A solitary wind: and it hath passed.
PAO. [*Embracing her.*] Do you still fear?
FRANC. Ah, Paolo! if we
Should die to-night, then whither would our souls
Repair? There is a region which priests tell of
Where such as we are punished without end.
PAO. Were we together, what can punish us?
FRANC. Nothing! Ah, think not I can love you
less—
Only I fear.
PAO. What can we fear, we two?
O God, Thou seest us Thy creatures bound
Together by that law which holds the stars
In palpitating cosmic passion bright;

By which the very sun enthrals the earth,
And all the waves of the world faint to the moon
Even by such attraction we two rush
Together through the everlasting years.
Us, then, whose only pain can be to part,
How wilt Thou punish ? For what ecstasy
Together to be blown about the globe !
What rapture in perpetual fire to burn
Together !—where we are is endless fire.
There centuries shall in a moment pass,
And all the cycles in one hour elapse !
Still, still together, even when faints Thy sun,
And past our souls Thy stars like ashes fall,
How wilt Thou punish us who cannot part ?

FRANC. I lie out on your arm and say your name—
" Paolo ! " " Paolo ! "

PAO. " Francesca ! "

[*They slowly pass through the curtains.*

A pause.

Enter NITA.

NITA. Ah!
Where are my lady and Lord Paolo?
Gone out into the moonlight! It is well
For her to meet her lover when she choose:
And I must run in from Bernardo's arms.
'Tis very late! I'll sit and end this sewing—
I cannot work. [*Walks up and down.*] Where
can my mistress be?

[NITA *touches abstractedly the strings of a mandolin.*

LUCREZIA *enters hurriedly.*

LUC. [*Aside.*] O! he is subtly hidden—and where?
—and where?
I have set that on which now I cannot stay.
Nita, you are alone! Where is your mistress?

NITA. I cannot tell, my lady.

LUC. Look in my eyes!
You left her?

NITA. But a moment.

LUC. And alone ?

NITA. Lord Paolo——

LUC. [*Seizing her arm.*] Ah !

NITA. My lady, hurt me not.

LUC. Stammer the truth out !

NITA. He came to the door—

LUC. No further ?

NITA. And she sighed out, " Let him come."

LUC. And you left them together ?

NITA. I went out——

LUC. Together then ! Now, now ! Quick, dry those tears
For we must use our wit.

NITA. And you, too, tremble !

LUC. And he—Lord Malatesta ?

NITA. Know you not
He hath ridden off to the camp ?

LUC. But might return !

NITA. [*Trembling.*] O ! but he must not !

LUC. Yet some accident——

NITA. There would be noise and stir at his return.

LUC. You have heard no sound? Remember fiercely! Nothing?

I do not mean of hooves, nor armour chink—

You have heard not even a step?

NITA. [*Trembling.*] What mean you?—No.

LUC. Not even a soft step?

NITA. I am faint with fear.

[*She staggers.*

LUC. [*Seizing her hand.*] Which way went they, these two?

NITA. I cannot tell.

LUC. This door is fast!—then through the curtains?

NITA. Yes.

LUC. They seem to tremble still! Come with me, quick!

NITA. I am faint.

LUC. Come with me.

[*She drags her to the curtain.*

Ah! whose hand is that?

[GIOVANNI, *parting the curtains from the other side, comes slowly through.*

NITA. O, sir! we had not thought you back so soon.

GIO. Where is your mistress?

NITA. Sir, I cannot tell.

GIO. Is it not time you dressed her all in white,
And combed out her long hair as for a sleep?

NITA. 'Tis past the hour.

GIO. You have a curl awry,
And falling o'er your eyebrow—bind it up.

NITA. I cannot, sir.

GIO. Well, leave us: when your mistress
Is ready, I will call for you.

[*Exit* NITA. *There is a pause, in which* GIOVANNI *and* LUCREZIA *gaze at each other.*

LUC. [*Going slowly up to him.*] O, sir!
I would beseech of you— [*She starts.*] ah!
Giovanni,
You have hurt your hand: there's blood upon it
here. [*Takes his hand and looks at it.*
GIO. 'Tis not my blood!
LUC. O, then——
GIO. "O, then!" is all.
[*As in a frenzy.*] And now their love that was so
secret close
Shall be proclaimed. Tullio, Carlo, Biagi!—
They shall be married before all men. Nita!
Rouse up the house and bring in lights, lights,
lights!
There shall be music, feasting and dancing.
Wine shall be drunk. Candles, I say! More
lights!
More marriage lights! Where tarry they the
while,
The nuptial tapers? Rouse up all the house!

[*All this while* SERVANTS *and others, half dressed, are continually rushing in with lights and torches. They stand whispering.*

GIO. [*Slowly.*] Carlo, go through the curtains, and pass in
To the great sleeping-chamber: you shall find
Two there together lying: place them, then,
Upon some litter and have them hither brought
With ceremony.

[*Exeunt* CARLO *and Four* SERVANTS.

GIOVANNI *paces to and fro.*

The curse, the curse of Cain!
A restlessness has come into my blood,
And I begin to wander from this hour
Alone for evermore.

LUC. [*Rushing to him.*] Giovanni, say
Quickly some light thing, lest we both go mad!

GIO. Be still! A second wedding here begins,
And I would have all reverent and seemly:

For they were nobly born, and deep in love.

Enter blind ANGELA, *slowly.*

ANG. Will no one take my hand? Two lately dead
Rushed past me in the air. O! Are there not
Many within this room all standing still?
What are they all expecting?

GIO. Lead her aside:
I hear the slow pace of advancing feet.

Enter SERVANTS *bearing in* PAOLO *and* FRANCESCA *dead upon a litter.*

LUC. Ah! ah! ah!

GIO. Break not out in lamentation!

[*A pause . . . The* SERVANTS *set down the litter.*

LUC. [*Going to litter.*] I have borne one child, and she has died in youth!

GIO. [*Going to litter.*] Not easily have we three
come to this—
We three who now are dead. Unwillingly
They loved, unwillingly I slew them. Now
I kiss them on the forehead quietly.

[*He bends over the bodies and kisses them on the forehead. He is shaken.*]

LUC. What ails you now?

GIO. She takes away my strength
I did not know the dead could have such hair.
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep!

[*The bodies are reverently covered over.*]

CURTAIN

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